

SPONSA REGIS

AUGUST, 1965

THERE IS NO
CONTRADICTION BETWEEN
THE DISPOSITIONS OF
SUBMISSION AND PERFECT
OBEDIENCE AND THE
PREVALENCE OF AN
ATTITUDE OF OPENNESS
WITHIN A RELIGIOUS
COMMUNITY.

SPONSA REGIS

A SPIRITUAL REVIEW FOR SISTERS

AUGUST 1965

VOLUME 36

NUMBER 12

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NIHIL OBSTAT: Reinold Theisen, O.S.B., *Censor deput.* IMPRIMATUR:
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Published monthly by monks of Saint John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota. Rev. Ronald Roloff, O.S.B., Editor; Rev. Myron Kasprick, O.S.B., Managing Editor; Rev. Raymond Roseliep, Poetry Editor. Advisory Board: Rev. Kilian McDonnell, O.S.B., Sister Ritamary Bradley, C.H.M., Sister M. Rose Emmanuella Brennan, S.N.J.M., Sister M. Emmanuel Collins, O.S.F., Mother Mary Robert Falls, O.S.U., Sister M. Jean Frances Fiffe, O.P., Sister M. Jeremy Hall, O.S.B., Sister M. Jerome Keeler, O.S.B., Sister M. Teresa Francis McDade, B.V.M., Sister Mary Virginia Micka, C.S.J., Sister M. Charles Borromeo Muckerhirm, C.S.C., Sister Mary Emil Penet, I.H.M., Sister Mary James Walsh, S.N.D., Sister Annette Walters, C.S.J., Mother Mary Florence Wolff, S.L., Sister M. Francine Zeller, O.S.F.

Address all correspondence except poetry to Sponsa Regis, Saint John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota 56321 (Checks payable to Sponsa Regis.) Poetry should be sent to Rev. Raymond Roseliep, Loras College, Dubuque, Iowa 52003. 1 year \$2.50; 2 years \$4.00; single copy 25 cents. Sterling area (except Australia): 1 year 18s; 2 years 29s; single copy 1s 11d. Australia: 1 year 23s; 2 years 37s; single copy 2s 3d. Agent for India: Asian Trading Corporation, Post Box No. 1505, Bombay-1. Indexed in the *Catholic Periodical Index*. Printed by Sentinel Publishing Company, 413 East Saint Germain Street, Saint Cloud, Minnesota. Second class postage paid at Saint Cloud, Minnesota. (Do not send mail to this address.)

Toward An Open Atmosphere

WILLIAM F. HOGAN, C.S.C.

Much is being written today about the "new breed" of religious, the product of a civilization marked with the effects of wars, technology, materialism, and other forces. It would be unrealistic to assert that there is no difference between the young religious of today and of twenty-five or even ten years ago; environmental influences do much to shape the attitudes of youth and these influences have been changing constantly and substantially. However, it would be likewise unrealistic to totally condemn the attitudes of the young religious as revolutionary and out of harmony with the basic institutions of the religious state, even though many religious may experience difficulty in understanding them.

One of the most consistent objections mentioned against the young religious of today is their inability to accept the *status quo* concerning the relative passivity and secrecy which has prevailed in most religious communities, together with the exaggerated and often misunderstood correlative of blind obedience. Youth of this age have generally been raised in an atmosphere in which they know what is going on and are free to speak their minds about it; the old saying that "children should be seen and not heard" no longer holds true in modern society and youth find it very difficult to enter and adjust to religious life if this is expected of them. On the other hand, those religious who have been formed in the tradition that religious subjects should be neither seen nor heard cannot understand and sometimes are scandalized at the attitude of the young.

Actually it is a good and wholesome influence which is being brought to religious institutes by the young, an influence which can bring many benefits to the institutes and the Church when it is channeled in the right direction. In so many religious communities there has prevailed an excessive secretiveness about community business and policies; too often religious have been kept in the dark about basic matters which touch them intimately in their commitment to Christ and the Church. It has not been

unknown that religious learn about community matters from the laity or newspapers before they have been divulged within the community. This has produced strange reactions on the part of laity who inquire of religious about policy matters or business of the community and are informed that they do not know. Is it any wonder that some people look on some religious as childish, and that we find much criticism of religious life by the laity? And when there is a very closed mentality within the community about keeping the religious informed of the policies and business of the family to which they have pledged their lives, there is fertile ground for rumors and criticism on the part of the religious. The energy wrongly expended in this direction could have been put to much better use for the good of the community and of the Church.

There is no contradiction between the dispositions of submission and perfect obedience and the prevalence of an attitude of openness within a religious community. It would seem that for a long time there has existed the idea that in order to maintain religious obedience on a very high level religious communities must preserve an element of reticence concerning issues affecting the community; these must not be divulged to any except those in authority, whose duty it is to determine the course of community action. Such ideas can even be found in books for spiritual reading. Whether it is a fear that religious will challenge authority and thus violate their vow or the virtue of obedience, or a fear that they will become too preoccupied with matters other than their own sphere of work, the fear is a needless one. No matter how much religious might discuss matters brought to their attention or how many suggestions they might make, the decisions rest with community authorities and the religious will obey and receive the merit of obedience; further, superiors can always check any excessive preoccupation with such matters. Besides, it would be beneficial to some religious to become a little concerned with matters other than their own work, for some become so wrapped up in their own area that they develop a very narrow vision.

A community actually has much to gain from a general air of openness about the basic policies and problems of the community. This does not mean that particular problems should necessarily become public knowledge, although some benefit might accrue to

the community if the more important ones were discriminately revealed. New insights and suggestions for improvement will come from religious subjects when they are invited to express them to major superiors; and the greater the number of insights and suggestions from different viewpoints, the greater should be the gain for the community by enabling the administration to reach the best possible decisions for the good of the religious institute and of the Church. It is true that there are some channels provided by the law of the Church and the particular law of communities whereby religious are able to make their contributions through chapters, councils, and in some cases committees;¹ but unless there is a general atmosphere which welcomes insights and recommendations, these channels will be ineffectual. Even more, the scope of these organs is rather limited and well defined; even when they function effectively, there is still room for other contributions on the part of the religious.

There is always room for and need for new outlooks on matters which concern religious communities; for the nature of religious life almost sets communities in a regular pattern in their action. Many religious who are not in a position of authority, or who do not have an official advisory capacity such as that of a councillor, may have something to offer to the betterment of community policy and the advancement of the good of the institute and consequently of the Church. It is but in accord with basic common sense that religious be aware of the issues faced by their communities in order that they may be able to make the contribution which is theirs to make; and religious virtue must always be in harmony with common sense.

An air of openness has the very important effect of making the religious feel that they belong to their communities, and perhaps this is a big factor in the efforts being made by young religious to bring about such an atmosphere. Young people of today are being trained to look at their lives as a commitment to a cause; with the emphasis of the new theological approaches, students view their lives and occupations as a dedication to the cause of Christ in this world and to some particular facet of Christ's mission. They

¹ Cf. Wm. F. Hogan, "Criticism and Loyalty in Religious Life," in *Sponsa Regis*, June 1964, pp. 300-306; "The Democratic Aspect of Religious Life," in *Review for Religious*, May 1963, pp. 327-332.

feel a need for involvement in whatever they do; they have a sense of belonging. When they enter religious life, they cannot consider it as a job; they cannot look at the community as an institution but as a family, a family which is a segment of the larger family of the Mystical Body. They expect to feel that they are parts of this family, with an awareness of its problems as well as its blessings. If they do not find an atmosphere of openness they experience confusion, and wonder how they can possibly live out their commitment to Christ when they are not made to feel that they belong in the way that they think they should experience this sense of belonging. For them there may appear to be a contradiction between the Christian commitment and religious life. It may be difficult for senior religious to appreciate this feeling of the young, but it is a real issue with them, and the more that youth are affected by the new approaches in teaching religion, the greater will be this feeling of a need to belong.

Religious dedicate their lives and themselves to the furthering of the mission of Christ in a particular religious institute; they must never be treated in such a way that they come to look upon themselves as a number or a cog in a machine. While nothing positive would ever be done to give religious real occasion to view their lives this way, still the negative matter of not involving the religious in decisions of policy and the solution of problems in an active way does offer such an occasion, an occasion which would be avoided if there were more openness and an invitation to contribute suggestions. Many communities have witnessed the effects of a greater solidarity among the religious when the members of a house have been asked to make suggestions in such things as preparations for new buildings or academic evaluations of their school; and they have found at the same time that the religious have many valuable suggestions to offer for the good of the house or school. And those communities which have invited contributions from their members have not experienced a lessening of religious obedience or a lag in the pursuit of perfection.

One result of more openness which should not be underestimated is the fact that it would serve to inculcate in the religious a more realistic view of some facets of religious life. Take for example the matter of finances; most religious do not have a realistic

vision of the temporal side of religious life because they are used to having their needs taken care of when they arise. The community always seems to have money when it is needed and there is no real want in religious life. It would probably be an eye-opener to most religious if superiors would give subjects a general financial report of the house, province, or institute as a whole; religious then might not take so much for granted. Or if religious were treated to a broad view of the difficulties facing an ordinary house—or even better, of a province in the administration of various institutions—might they not see themselves in the broader framework of the house, province, or congregation? All too often the individual religious becomes so wrapped up in his or her own problems as to forget that there are other difficulties facing the community besides his or hers. Sometimes a religious resents the fact that more attention is not given to the problems of the individual. Openness might serve to instill a broader vision in religious so that they may learn to see themselves in true perspective, with a more adult view of reality.

There are many matters in a community which cannot be made matters for general knowledge, but there are many others which are jealously kept secret without sufficient reason. If the religious of a community were kept informed of basic matters, how much more intelligently they might be able to answer the questions of the laity and thus obviate a situation which the man on the street cannot fathom. How much greater would be the confidence between subjects and superiors through the sense of belonging which the religious would develop. How much more would be the concern of religious for the common good of their communities and of the Church when they know that their suggestions and constructive criticisms are welcomed; what a greater willingness there would be to act in the best interests of the community, to give greater service to the Church. How much more realistic would be the outlook of religious on their own lives!

To many this may sound like unadulterated naturalism, but it is not. There are many supernatural implications in the matter of promoting more openness in religious institutes, for any natural means which foster greater commitment to Christ in the work of a part of the Mystical Body has a supernatural aspect and will

bring the soul into greater supernatural union with God. Religious who have been trained in a tradition which stresses blind faith and passivity will find it difficult to accept such a view; nevertheless, it is a view which deserves much consideration. Some may feel that young religious should not seek to know and to speak out, but should rather respect time-honored practices and imitate the example of faith of their elder brothers or sisters in religion. Certainly the young must respect community traditions and the virtue of other community members; but they must still seek to make their own contribution to their communities and the Church. There is no contradiction here.

Aggiornamento demands that religious communities adapt to the needs of the times, so that they may more effectively bear witness to Christ in this world. This means that there may need to be some adjustment to the mentality of today's young religious insofar as this is a good mentality, while at the same time these young people are formed to even higher ideals and guided to the realization of these ideals in their lives. Openness in the Church is a characteristic of our age; may it likewise be a distinguishing characteristic of religious institutes of our day. May religious communities give thought to the ways in which they might create a more open atmosphere within!

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Religious Silence

G. R. MOENS, O.P.

Silence is one of the essential foundations of all religious life. This is why it is recommended by all monastic rules. The ancient Dominican constitutions spoke of it as a *pulchra caeremonia*, "a beautiful ceremony"; today, it is described as *sanctissima lex*, that is, the holy rule or law. Perhaps this change of accent, changing to a "law" what was previously a "ceremony," indicates a progressive evolution in the exercise of silence: formerly interpreted by the holy brothers as a spontaneous holy act, later considered as an arduous obligation. Be that as it may, it is a fact that in all religious communities, a transgression of the rule of silence is a "chapter fault," continually repeated; and often enough one hears the old religious reproach the younger generation for being more talkative than their elders. However, all is not negative regarding this pertinent question of silence; one can also see a positive side. Without doubt, there is a real desire on the part of young religious today for genuineness and sincerity. Disliking mannerism, formalism, and imposed discipline, they are able to lead a life of silence only if it is an authentic expression of a truly interior recollection; its traditional observance, far from being a constraining conformity which leads to unconformism and deception, will rather be undertaken as a personal experience. Furthermore, we all run the grave danger of not understanding the value of silence as an observance, as an exterior atmosphere, an imposed obligation. Hence we wish to give a few suggestions concerning the meaning and the importance of silence. These clarifications may help some profoundly sincere souls rediscover a greater consciousness of its supernatural value.

It is with the aid of general psychology that we must clarify the meaning of silence. An ordinary phenomenon among men, it becomes in religious life a visible human expression of the life of supernatural grace.

AN ELOQUENT SILENCE

Silence, for the ordinary person, signifies a return to peace and calm. In everyday life it is difficult for a man to find peace. He is in perpetual motion, always working toward an objective, straining toward some end, tossed about by externals, fascinated by the world, absorbed by the tumult of life. Thus he never finds himself, for he flees from peace and is continually absorbed by externals. Selfishness and superficiality characterize this agitation of our contemporaries. But there is also "a going out of oneself," an opening to the world and to others; this opening is love. Love means decentralization. It makes the center of another's life the focus of our own life. It is the gift of self; it is not self seeking. This meeting with another is not utilitarian, nor is it satisfied with a superficial encounter. A superficial and external meeting can never affect another, nor in it does one willingly give of oneself.

Only the silent man is capable of a sacrificial love for, while conscious of his inner being, he breaks the external flow of his passions. Man should remain silent before events and before himself. Silence permits him to halt and to free his attention from a life of pleasure and satisfaction which seeks only self. Thus he finds freedom and the depths of the life of his soul. It is only when we reach the soul of another that we can carry on an inner dialogue. It is only in turning back upon ourselves that we discover the secret access which leads us to an intimate encounter with another. Speech which issues from this silence is dialogue, encounter, and a love that invites; it is above vain chatter, empty words, and wounding criticism.

These brief reflections make evident the negative aspect of an imposed silence. Speech is the source of so many evils, so much harm! It is not always a true manifestation of our interior thoughts. On the contrary, it is often a mask, a lie, a half truth. In our everyday encounters, speech is often the instrument of unchained passions. Man senses himself under the ascendancy of another. He feels that he is being "used," a means, the object of the selfishness of another. Speech is so often contempt, scorn, destructive judgment!

But speech proceeding from an unfolding silence, coming from our inner personality, this speech is able to welcome another. Each

becomes present to the other through a corporal sacrament, a reciprocal participation in the life of their souls. Friendship is an inner sharing. True dialogue, which sounds the depths of silence, is the externalizing of a community of life, the appearance of a reciprocal love which offers and gives itself. Thus, when' we come face to face with another in this type of dialogue, the mutual friendliness and pure sacrificial love, even the joyous pleasantries and liveliness such as one sees and hears at convent recreations, are not degraded into vain chatter but become the expression of a common participation in a personal joyousness, the joy of the children of God.

But even in the best of personal dialogue, speech should give way to silence. For speech is always relative, a witness to the inexpressible, the indescribable. The richness of the actual or the real is greater than all that words are able to enfold. Language can suggest, try to express the depths of the soul, but in truth it says so little. Speech is not only a means of communicating our relations with each other; it can isolate, hollow out a distance between us. Without doubt, silence can also accomplish all this but in a way much more profound, much more subtle. And, if it is able to build a wall of indifference or of odious contempt, it can also portray the loving and silent proximity of the loved one. Silence can be so heavy with meaning that the least word appears to be a sacrilege. In reality, the eloquence of silence enfolds all speech; and this eloquence has no comparison. The loving communion between two lovers, intimately present to each other in a world of silence, need not have recourse to words. The silence itself speaks and expresses a charm full of respect and modesty, which is that of the lovers. Gabriel Marcel, in one of his characters, expresses this ideal in the words, "it is enough to know that you are there." And Gorter says it equally well in his sonnet on friendship: Now, the music of words is silent, but the comprehension is like a sound.

CONTEMPLATIVE SILENCE

How is one to create this living silence, this fertile soil of the soul? It is born only in reflection, in concentration, in self-examination.

RELIGIOUS SILENCE

A person who does not make this spiritual self-scrutiny but spends his life in externals, finds himself deprived of a vital impulse, a stimulating impetus, empty and solitary. The peaceful man, capable of self-communion, is awakened only in the silence of reflection. To reflect means, in effect, "to be near to." It is a turning toward the world of men, such as they are, and not in a utilitarian scheme of "what is profitable for me."

Introspection makes a man attentive. He enters into a meditative contact with reality; he becomes receptive to the internal resonance of things. In contemplation, the silent man uncovers the profound depth in objects and in events, their transparency, the mark of another world which we encounter through externalizing... "if the soul listens." The man who shatters the vital scheme of practical advantage and enters into himself, in silence, will soon sense rising within himself a disinterested admiration for the "being" of things and an existential astonishment when faced with his own existence: *l'admiratio!* Only the man who bears in his soul this questioning wonderment can enter into contact with God. In truth, he is henceforth detached from himself and no longer exists for himself. He has discovered the creative presence of God "behind" the multi-colored ornamentation of things, which has become the sacramental expression of His omnipresence.

In wordless silence the religious begins to turn toward prayer. God is a hidden God. He is not visible to us as a rising sun on a beautiful spring morning. He is never at the side of someone or something. He is always *derrière* and in his creatures. *In ipso vivimus, movemur et sumus.* "In him we live, move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28). God speaks to us through his creation, but only vigilance, taken in a religious sense, can unfold it to us and bring us face to face with him. We find God only when we turn back to ourselves. *Deus intimior intimo meo*, wrote Saint Augustine: "God is nearer to me than I am to myself." It is in silent contemplation that we stand before God. The apparent emptiness that we experience in silence is that unseizable and subtle word, the self-revelation of the living God, who attracts man and draws him by His grace. Silence orientates man toward God; he stands before Him in an attitude of esteem, of profound respect and of love. Prayer is a dialogue with God. Just as the disappear-

ance of love and respect between two persons causes dialogue to cease, so also this being-before-God is effaced when man's respect for God ceases to exist. But with the silent man, the shudder of fear toward the divine never disappears, for he is always receptive of the hidden mystery behind everything, the concealed sense in all events. He is welcomed by God who, being not of this world, shows Himself nonetheless by a thousand attentive solitudes full of love.

Thus reflection becomes for the religious a contemplative prayer, an experience of the divine presence, guarded in silence as in a precious case where the Holy One is present. The silent man resembles the mother of all contemplatives, Mary, who "kept all these words in her heart" and meditated on them (Luke 2:51).

CONSECRATED SILENCE

The profound meaning of silence is to find oneself alone before God. The world of silence is the world of prayer. Silence alone makes a man capable of a divine welcome and exchange: God makes himself known to us only in silence. "And the Lord passed. There was a great storm so strong that it cleaved the mountains and shattered the rocks before God; but God was not in the storm; and after the storm, an earthquake, but God was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake, a fire, but God was not in the fire; and after the fire, the sound of a gentle breeze. And when he (Elias) had heard it he covered his face with his mantle, for the Lord was passing" (3 Kings 19:11-13). In the Apocalypse we read: "And the Lamb opened the seal, and there was a silence in heaven, for the space of a half hour" (Apoc. 8:1). In silence the Word of God came down to earth: "For while all things were in quiet silence...Thine almighty Word came down from heaven, from His heavenly throne."¹

The silence of the nun is a holy, religious silence because it is a sacramental silence: the manifestation of the presence of God to the nun and of the nun to God. This silence is the figure of the soul disappearing into this hidden God, being enveloped by him; it is the expression of an interior enthusiasm regarding God, being ravished in God, of a being filled with God. Man esteems God so deeply that he becomes silent, ravished as he is by the divine presence. His joy becomes a recollection. This is why reli-

¹ Introit of the Sunday after Christmas.

gious silence is not a poor, empty passivity, but supreme activity and receptivity. Like the calm, silent, and happy proximity of two sister souls, to whom a mutual presence is enough, so also consecrated silence invades the heart of her who is filled with the still and silent presence of God. This is why monastic silence is an interior attitude, a "*pulchra caeremonia*." It is also the reason why this silence exacts the welcoming of divine invitations, the searching for our hidden God.

The interior source of exterior silence is an interest inclining us toward God, a searching for him. This is why religious silence is always a silence imposed upon self-love. It comes to confirm, from the outside, the soul who is conscious of being able to do nothing other than to receive. It comes as a witness of grace!

In the old law the Israelites were forbidden to pronounce the name of Yahweh, for to them the name was closely linked to the reality itself. To call someone by his true name was to lay hold of him, to have "a grip" on him. In pronouncing the name of Yahweh man had, so to say, "a grip" on God. Thus the roles were reversed. Man took a proud attitude toward God. But, in reality, he can do nothing without God. It is God who has "a grip" on man and not the reverse! Silence is then essentially an expression of humility toward God, an expression of the complete possession of man by Him. When a person retires within himself, he finds himself and all other things possessed by God. "I can love within myself only that which is the true source of being and life," writes Lavelle. This divine intimacy is also the reason why it is so difficult for us to find God. It is because he is nearer to us than we are to ourselves.

Religious silence is essentially a silence of prayer. However, this does not mean a continuance of formal prayer, and still less of meditation. It is the holy interval of prayer: the silent intimacy near God, life in his presence, such as that of a child who plays under the watchful eye of his mother.

As an expression of our feebleness without God, as well as an expression of our being seized by him, being gripped by holiness, religious silence is also a silence of respect, such as man in general renders to holiness. Thus, confronted by death, man experiences a contact with the Absolute. He is silent. This silence denotes

respect toward the sacred and the majestic. The presence of death extinguishes in man all outward activity, including that of speech. In a way, he becomes the spectator of a reality which is accomplished outside himself, or in him, without being of him. This respect shown by man when he is confronted with the transcendent, is one of the characteristic attitudes of human behavior. In his normal encounters man expresses a certain independence and a personal freedom before others, by which he is able to try to push himself to the fore. But in his encounter with Absolute, in his encounter with God, man realizes his total dependence, and he feels the inconvenience of a relaxation of his normal attitude. He therefore proposes to himself a commensurable attitude by which he can be present in a posture of respect and submission. Furthermore, he must acknowledge that, in the last analysis, he can do nothing but "be there," nothing more. Thus a liturgical posture and an attitude of prayer are commensurable modes of action when we realize that we are in God's presence. It is suppressing in ourselves all that is profane; the placing of ourselves before Him in respectful silence.

Our religious silence is something very positive. It is a silence full of respect, a holy silence, one that does not refer to a psychological repression but to a profound depth where the breath of God can play simply and peacefully on the harp strings of man's soul.

SILENCE OF REPENTANCE

A religious community is not a community of saints, but a community of women who are striving toward sanctity. This is why silence is not spontaneously accepted by all as "*pulchra caeremonia*" but is rather thought of as "*lex*," the rule or law of silence imposed from without. It is evident that religious silence is not for all the expression of an interior and affective beatitude. A love of God so intense that it produces an instinctive wonderment can be experienced as a state of soul, more or less permanent, only by mystics. In general, for the normal religious it will manifest itself in her spiritual life in a more or less sporadic manner. Nonetheless, the rule and the constitutions oblige her to a continuous silence. What then can be the sense of such an observance—of a silence which manifestly does not express a very profound intimacy with

Christ? We can throw some light on the sense of such an obligation if we consider it from a general, human point of view, to which the religious context will then give an entirely original significance.

We have already spoken of a common love wherein words become superfluous. A mutual spiritual love can be so intense that the body itself is shaken. Similar psychological experiences of physical repression are normal in human existence. A death, a great sorrow, the thought of an examination, all are sufficient to affect one's appetite. An unexpected joy can equally stun a person. All these phenomena show us the deep bond that unites the body with the soul of man. The reverse is equally true. Two dear friends, if separated, can experience a great spiritual affliction or pain. Corporal suffering can be transformed into deep spiritual sorrow. A good or bad digestive tract can make a man content or capricious. All this can be applied to silence. Seen positively, silence is the bodily expression of an inner concentration, of true contemplation, or of a religious experience. Negatively, it represents a physical effort to attain an inner spiritual peace.

Thus, a student puts his head between his hands to ward off all external distractions and thereby arrive at a truly inner concentration. He is not as yet recollected, but if he perseveres in his physical effort he will finally achieve it. In the same way, a venerable procession of anchorites, hermits, cenobites, monks, and nuns, throughout the history of the Church, retired into the desert, into solitary hermitages, into silent forests, or into mountainous regions in order to find there an interior silence and thereby lead a more profound spiritual life.

If a person is silent exteriorly he will become, little by little, interiorly silent. This spontaneous expression in a bodily attitude of a spiritual experience is one that we assume voluntarily in order to arrive at a state of spiritual intercourse. A man forces himself to fast in order to direct his soul toward an attitude which instinctively lessens his appetite. He will force himself to refrain from speaking to attain to that state of soul which, in itself, communicates a certain calmness. This is a general law of psychology which serves here as the foundation for our mortification and penance. Viewed negatively, Christian asceticism indicates the intention of a person who wishes to attain a greater interior love of God and

who willingly places himself in external conditions which act as a spontaneous transfer toward a very elevated love of God. The penitent is magnanimous. Full of confidence in God, he wishes to outstrip himself. He shows his good will by a sincere love; his exterior penance henceforth becomes a symbolic act by which he calls upon God to help him, to lead him spiritually to the state which his visible mortifications now express. In the same way, religious silence, a negative form of penance, is a prayer of supplication in which the deliberate, generous, and loving choice of silence is offered to obtain divine mercy and the grace to love God more completely. It can be likened to a child who climbs a steep stairs with timorous confidence, knowing that her mother is at the top and will come to rescue her in her arms. So also, a religious chooses to be silent, going forward in an unshaken confidence, in an irresistible love of God who comes to meet her.

But religious silence can also be a penitential silence, when it becomes a silence of reparation. A grave sin can completely disorganize a person. Remorse, inciting shame, can drive us into a silent solitude. "You will be a wanderer in the land" (Gen. 4:12), God said to Cain after his fratricide. A sinner flees the company of men; he flees conversation for fear that his words will betray him. His silence is the consciousness of his culpability. This fundamental religious experience of sin intimately felt as bewildering, not only in the soul but in the body as well, urges the repentant sinner into a voluntary silence of repentance for his own sins. Thus he will strengthen his consciousness of sin and its culpability. Religious silence expresses, then, the repentance of the sinner and, at the same time, a sudden desire for a more intimate life of love.

But man can also expiate the sins of others and solicit for them the grace of conversion. In voluntarily taking upon ourselves the confusion experienced from sinning, the religious can atone for the sins of another by her silence of repentance. She thus imitates the expiation of Christ, who "took upon himself our sufferings and was oppressed by our sorrows... who was transfixed by our sins... and whose wounds heal us" (Is. 53:4-5).

SILENT LOVE

The grave danger of a rigid formalism in the matter of religious silence is still further diminished if one thinks of it in reference to

charity and to religious life as it is lived in our communities. From a philosophical point of view, human existence, as it is, should be considered as a "being-with" existence. Man is essentially a social being, and there is nothing in him that is totally outside of this realm. Our physical nature is the phenomenal expression of this fundamental sociability. In fact, physical existence has meaning only in so far as it is a co-human existence. But especially as a person, man is a social being by his very nature. As a spiritual being, man has no personal or private sphere which permits him to escape from the community. But, as a free being, his sociability becomes for him both a task and a calling. It is his obligation to live in a love and a justice that will edify this community.

Man is equally social in the domain of religion. There is no relation to God that does not include a relation to man. "They believe that they love God because they love no one," wrote Peguy in speaking of bigots. To say that we love God and not to love our neighbor is to lie. This does not mean, however, that the personal sphere is to be suppressed; it still possesses social obligations. The more personal the relation of a man to God, the more intimate will become his relation to his neighbor.

Religious life is *par excellence* an experience in Christian charity. Through their common vocation, religious form a "united whole," a oneness common to all. It is their nearness to God that makes them so near to each other and which confers upon all their actions a profound community importance. Religious silence is also a powerful incentive toward community living. A rupture of this silence can be a sin against charity. It is a mistake to say that the so-called jovial are the most sociable. The sociability of a valuable and jovial individual is often one of natural temperament and disposition. A genuine sense of community living can only be a spiritual experience. A religious may show a greater knowledge of the spirit of community life by keeping silent than by greeting each and every one with words and signs of friendship. In the atmosphere of the Real Presence, silence is the authentic gift of the truly social being. All social acts *par excellence* are accomplished in silence. It is in silence that man loves, suffers, offers, prays. It is because religious silence is a hidden form of prayer, a consecrated silence, that it is so able to form the community. In our prayers for each other we are more intimately united each

to each than we are in our daily encounters. All communion of love and friendship in this gift of prayer is present to God.

Negatively, religious silence also exercises a profoundly social influence. We have already shown how much evil it is able to prevent. This is true especially in convents. A religious community is like a pond: those who take it upon themselves to disturb the surface of the pond, disturb the entire surface. Vibrations of broken silence spread over everyone.

In many cases, it is better to remain silent than it is to speak; this is evident if one considers the relative essentialness of speech. This essentialness is equivocal, especially when one is speaking of others. Since we are scarcely able to speak the truth of ourselves, how can we speak the truth of our neighbor? Our neighbor is not a static reality but a living being! Our words can reach only certain modes of action, certain traits of others, but never the center of his spiritual personality. No one exposes himself entirely by his exterior actions. "A man is worth more than his acts," according to a common saying. Thus, being able to penetrate only "something" of another, our speech can never be more than a half truth. Silence protects for us and for others an infinity of possibilities which escape speech. The person who can remain silent before others is in truth "a being of possibility."

Hence silence, considered negatively, expresses respect for others. Each religious has her own personal sphere which we ought to respect. We have already stated that this private domain is not opposed to community living. A community is not a mass but a communion of individuals. The less a person is part of a mass, the more worthy is he to be a member of the community.

Man attains to his full stature as a being only before God. Since prayer is a personal meeting with God, it bestows on each religious an inviolable personality. Whoever disturbs at this level reaches to the very heart of his neighbor's being. But he who respects others at this level by remaining silent performs a truly community act. Thus, silence is not only a question of social charity but also one of justice. Others have a right to our silence, and when we violate this sacred right the words of the evangelist can well be applied to us: "Of every idle word man speaks, he shall give account on the day of judgment" (Mt. 12:36).

Religious silence possesses an extreme significance. It receives sense and value from personal experience, which is by nature dynamic. It evolves, develops, gives meaning to multiple interpretations. According to circumstances and personal adaptation, it becomes the visible expression of numerous attitudes of the soul. It never degenerates into a dead formalism or observance without obligation for those animated by a love of God and by a charity of service. Silence is the instrument or visible sign of our love of God; this is the real meaning of all positive self-restraint.

Religious silence can mean for each of us only a waiting, a growing unattachment, an inrushing overflow of love of God in our heart so full of desires and still so restive. This waiting is not an empty passivity. It is rather the opening up of the possibility of love. "It is good to wait in silence" (Lam. 3:26).

T.S. ELIOT, 1888-1965

Candle, shiver this January night,
wave your flame as a man's last breath
and all remembering. Disturb the universe
with light warm as poem, and die.
Mermaids, hold the sad notes steady; sing
him music from the farther room suddenly
full of voices, questions, fools
and the painful sound of emptiness.
O God, how cold is death
this side of the grave.
Hearse of my mind, carry him lightly
to the tomb. Marry him to the earth,
womb of his birth and his dying.

WILLIAM PAULY

Continual Prayer

EDWARD HAGEMANN, S.J.

We are told by Christ that "we ought always to pray and not to faint,"¹ and Saint Paul gives us the same admonition, "Pray without ceasing."² But how is this to be done? We know by experience how difficult prayer can be in itself. Then above all we have our work, which can at times consume all our energy, both mental and physical, making it practically impossible to turn our attention to God. Yet there must be some explanation, as Christ did not order us to do the impossible.

Some of the early writers of the Church have addressed themselves to the problem. Origen thought that prayer joined with work constitutes continual prayer. In fact, the life of a holy person is thus one continual prayer.³ Saint Athanasius says that whatever you do let there be a hymn to God in your heart.⁴ Saint Basil believes that continual prayer consists in an habitual virtuous attitude manifested in the various good works which fill up our whole life.⁵ This is pretty much the opinion of Saint Ambrose, who taught that that person prays unceasingly who while praying formally with heart and tongue at the proper times is assiduous in good works.⁶ Cassian doesn't bother about good works but holds to the frequent repetition of some aspiration while keeping oneself in the divine presence.⁷

Saint Thomas⁸ with his usual lucidity points out that we may speak of prayer in two ways: (1) by considering it in itself and (2) by considering it in its cause. Now the cause of prayer is desire arising from charity, and this desire ought to be in us continually, either actually or virtually. From this point of view Saint Thomas says that prayer ought to be continual, and in support he cites a statement made by Saint Augustine in his letter

¹ Luke 18:1.

² I Thess. 5:17.

³ J. B. Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, Patrologia Graeca, 11, 451. Henceforth PL (Patrologia Latina) and PG (Patrologia Graeca) will be used.

⁴ Migne, PG, 28, 270, 271.

⁵ Migne, PG, 31, 242, 243.

⁶ Migne, PL, 17, 805.

⁷ Migne, PL, 49, 831-836.

⁸ II,II, Q. 83, a. 14.

to the Lady Proba to the effect that faith, hope and charity are in themselves a prayer of continual desire.⁹ However, as we have our work to do, which at times, can be very distracting, we use formal prayer to recall that desire and to grow in it. And, Saint Thomas adds, this formal prayer should be continued long enough to arouse the fervor of the interior desire and should be discontinued when it engenders weariness.

We can find in Saint Augustine another statement, and that a strong one, that clearly illustrates Saint Thomas's position. Commenting on the 10th verse of the 37th Psalm, "All my desire is before thee," Saint Augustine says that our desire is our prayer, and if this desire is continuous, then the prayer is continuous. If the longing is lost, he says, then we lapse into silence, for "the coldness of charity is the heart's silence; its glowing ardor, the heart's outcry. If charity is always present, you are ever crying out; if always crying out, you are ever longing."¹⁰ And we can add, if ever longing, then ever praying.

As Saint Thomas says, desire springing from the love of God is the root of prayer. We find in the Psalms some beautiful examples of this desire. In the 142nd Psalm, verse 6, David exclaims, "My soul is as earth without water unto thee." This is a striking picture of the soul desiring God and is an illustration readily understood by the Israelites who depended so much on rain for the cultivation of their crops. If there is no rain, the soil is parched and cracked and thirsts for water. And the Psalmist continues: "Hear me speedily, O Lord; my spirit has fainted away." In a somewhat similar passage David writes when he had been forced to flee from Absalom into the waterless wastes of the desert: "O God, my God, to thee do I watch at break of day. For thee my soul has thirsted; for thee my flesh, O how many ways! In a desert land, where there is no way and no water, so in the sanctuary have I come before thee, to see thy power and thy glory."¹¹

In another place (Ps. 41, v. 2) the Psalmist exclaims that his soul has such a desire for God that it pants after Him as the hart pants after the fountain of water. This again is another picture

⁹ *St. Augustine, Letters*, Vol. II, New York, 1953, p. 390.

¹⁰ *St. Augustine on the Psalms*, Vol. II, Westminster, 1961, p. 344.

¹¹ Psalm 62:2-3.

familiar to the Hebrews. When in Palestine the streams are dried up in the hot summer sun the hart, weak with thirst, stands on the rocks over which water had run previously and seeks eagerly for water to slake his burning thirst.

Now the question may arise, How can this desire, this prayer, be continual? The difficulty is answered by Bishop Bossuet as explained by Father Caussade.¹² Continuity of prayer exists only in an intention to belong to God—a good will towards him—which always subsists in some manner in the soul. Springing from the love of God, it is a fundamental attitude so that no matter where we may be or what we may be doing, if we were asked to whom we belong, at the bottom of our heart we would always be disposed to reply: to God. Now according to Bossuet such an intention produces a succession of good movements that are consistent and uniform, all depending on the same interior principle, the habit of holy love. This is what is called perpetual contemplation or prayer. These movements are sometimes so little perceived that souls of good will can possess this precious gift without ever being aware of it. Personally I feel that a practical test would be to ask oneself, Do I knowingly hold anything back from God? If not, then I believe we can say we have that good intention.

Thus as Father Victorino Osende, O.P., points out, there are two kinds of prayer: prayer of the mind and prayer of the heart—prayer of the mind which is had in formal periods of mental prayer, prayer of the heart for the rest of the time.¹³ Springing from a love of God, prayer of the heart is made without reflection and without attention being actually fixed on it. While the mind is busy with a thousand exterior things, the will, the heart is centered on God. We see this in natural love, when a mother, busy perhaps with a number of tasks around the house, has nevertheless her heart fixed on her ailing child. In addition to this I might mention that just as the mother can have at the back of her mind a continual awareness of her child, so in prayer of the heart, I believe, there can be even in the midst of great exterior activity a certain attenuated awareness of God.

Father Caussade in one of his letters explains this prayer of the heart:

¹² *On Prayer*, London, 1949, p. 56-57.

¹³ *Fruits of Contemplation*, St. Louis, 1953, p. 157-158.

It is certain that there is a language of the heart which God alone understands, in which we speak to him by our desires only and other interior acts, just as we speak to men in articulate language with our voices. This language is what is called the prayer of the heart, all interior and purely spiritual. The Holy Spirit is then teaching us from within, in the depths of the soul; he listens to it, speaks to it, instructs it, moves it this way and that, and shapes it to his taste. These are operations of Spirit on spirit in which the subject itself understands, it seems, hardly anything, but from which it issues with certain impressions which have totally renovated it.¹⁴

Other names for this continual prayer are implicit prayer, virtual prayer, informal prayer. One of the modern authors who has treated this matter best is Leonce de Grandmaison. Scattered throughout his writings are helpful words on this type of prayer. I shall give one selection, rather long but, I believe, very instructive:

Virtual prayer is the habitual disposition of heart, mind, and will to hear and obey the voice of the interior Master, the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is docility to God.

Virtual prayer, by comparison with actual prayer, is a feeble and even empty state of mental activity. It consists in a state of feeling, a voluntary and affective state that is only intermittently conscious and that can be engaged in simultaneously with an entirely different and engrossing mental activity. . . .

It is virtually a prayer because it turns us toward the divine Sun much as a sunflower is drawn toward the physical sun. The instant a ray of divine light shines forth strong, distinct, and visible, it immediately touches the soul. And such rays are always beaming, for God is constantly pleased with a soul that is turned toward him. In consequence there is an uninterrupted exchange, a real conversation, even if not heard or consciously shared in by us.¹⁵

The docility that is had in this virtual prayer is due largely to the work of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. One has now come under the influence of the Holy Spirit. A great esteem of God's holy will has grown up, a great desire to serve him faithfully in all things, great and small. It is not so much now a question of obeying externally, even when there would be no sin at all in not obeying, as of perceiving and obeying the internal manifesta-

¹⁴ *Self-Abandonment to Divine Providence*, London, 1961, p. 161. There is much about prayer of the heart in Grou, *The School of Jesus Christ*, London, 1932, p. 279-285, or *How to Pray*, New York, 1955, p. 79-88.

¹⁵ *Tongues of Fire*, Notre Dame, 1961, p. 93-94.

tions of God's slightest desire through the touches of grace. The gifts that are always present in the soul with sanctifying grace, but which can be fettered in their activity by sinful habits, are now, as it were, unloosed and freed from the chains of self-seeking. One now instantly perceives God's will through interior touches of grace, and while remaining entirely free to give his assent or not, instantly gives his assent to grace.

While in other prayer (mental or vocal) there can be continual prayer outside of formal prayer if there is a strong desire for God, nevertheless this continued, constant prayer is realized perfectly in the state of a person who enjoys contemplative prayer even though he may be deeply involved in external work. An essential note of such contemplative prayer is, "I want God."¹⁶ It is "explicitized" in formal prayer but the desire is in the soul all the time. But we might ask, What is this contemplative prayer? Now, in the early stages of mental prayer one is taken up with pictures of the imagination and ideas about God. But after some time, during which these ideas are playing their role in solidifying our attitudes, we become tired of such things. Pictures of Christ in the imagination are no more Christ himself than is a statue of him, no matter how beautiful it may be, while bare thoughts about God during time of prayer can clog the brain and distract from him. At this stage it would be quite wrong, both spiritually and psychologically, to meditate in the strict sense, to use discursive prayer, as has been hitherto done. Intuition replaces ratiocination, and a sort of seeming inactivity sets in where the soul tends to become passive towards God although remaining active in repelling whatever would disturb this resting in God.

Contemplative prayer may be either infused or acquired. The latter, which alone we are considering, is known under different names: prayer of simple regard, prayer of silence, prayer of simple recollection, prayer of abandonment, etc. It consists for the intellect in looking at God in faith, and for the will in loving him, which, of course, involves desiring him. It is not turned in on itself, it does not advert to self, it does not make resolutions. It is

¹⁶ "The principal stage consists of this: 'O God, I want Thee, and I do not want anything else.' This is the essence of pure contemplative prayer." *The Spiritual Letters of Dom John Chapman, O.S.B.*, 2nd. ed., London, 1938, p. 289. See also p. 290, 293.

simply satisfied in having God or rather in wanting him. It is a thirst that is ever slaked and yet ever augmented.

How, then, can we arrive at this acquired contemplation, which ensures a state of continual prayer? The answer is simple. Practice mental prayer faithfully at whatever stage we may be at, not looking at it so much as a set exercise but rather following in it the attractions of grace. But to be attentive to grace we must keep the heart detached from worldly things, so that the gifts of the Holy Spirit may be more and more operative in us. These in their turn will ensure greater sensitivity to grace and greater faithfulness in our cooperation with it. Thus we shall grow in docility. All this means effective love for God—and also affective love, for we shall come to know God more intimately and love him more affectionately. The answer, then, is that given by Saint Augustine, "Dilige et quod vis fac": "Love and do what you will."¹⁷

¹⁷ Migne, PL, 35, 2033.

Short Notices

LETTERS TO ANN. By Sister Rose Darham, O.S.B. Joseph F. Wagner, Inc., New York, 1964. Pp. 155. Cloth, \$3.95.

The multiple roles and problems of the adolescent girl, no longer child but not yet adult, are faced squarely and unhysterically, yet with good humor. This guide to Christian development, the growing up in supernatural and natural virtues in actual situations in the life of a teenage girl, is meant to be a help to parents, educators, or to the young readers themselves.

IN THE LIGHT OF THE TRINITY. By Francois Charmot, S.J. Translated by Sister Helen Madeleine, S.N.D. The Newman Press, Westminster, 1964. Pp. xxii, 169. Cloth, \$3.50.

As a lengthy subtitle indicates, this is a study of the spirituality of Blessed Julie Billiart, the holy foundress of the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur. But we are grateful that the author first gives us a glimpse of the inspiring and heroic life of Mere Julie. The central chapters study the main theme: daughter of the Father, spouse of the Son, and temple of the Holy Spirit. A final chapter summarizes the work of the Sisters of Notre Dame up to the present.

SPONSA REGIS

A SPIRITUAL REVIEW FOR SISTERS,

VOLUME 36

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